

Rhodora

JOURNAL OF

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 55

June, 1953

No. 654

A NEW HYBRID DECIDUOUS RHODODENDRON

MARY G. HENRY

AFTER having read descriptions of our eastern deciduous Rhododendrons in J. K. Small's "Manual of the Southeastern Flora," I became especially interested in *Rhododendron prunifolium* (Small) Millais, both because its description made it seem attractive and because comparatively little was known about it. Years later when I was able to go to look for it, I called at the New York Botanical Garden and asked Dr. Small about it. He was greatly interested, said he had never seen it growing, and gave me the localities from the three herbarium sheets there, which had been collected in 1924 northwest of Cuthbert, in Randolph County, southwestern Georgia.

In July 1936 search in the localities Dr. Small had supplied did not yield the plant and natives from whom I inquired implied that a red "honeysuckle" did not exist. They had hunted, fished and lumbered all their lives in that part of Georgia and had never seen such a thing. Not discouraged, however, I hunted for and soon found, on July 10, a tiny stream that flowed under pine trees in a small, secluded valley in Randolph County. Following the stream on foot, with the temperature 115 degrees in the shade (the hottest day in the history of the weather bureau in that area), I came in a short time to an opening in the trees just above the stream and there, in a shaft of sunlight, was *Rhododendron prunifolium*, a great pillar of blood-red flowers.¹

The colony was a small one, some six or eight plants. Being an ardent conservationist did not prevent me from making her-

¹ Small gives the color of this azalea as "crimson" in his "Flora" and a number of others have copied this. The flowers of a hundred or more that I have seen since 1936 (many of them seedlings grown at the Ida Cason Foundation, Georgia) were all a bright blood-red with scarcely any variation in color.

barium specimens for the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (PH)² (*M. G. Henry 998*) and taking two small plants. Both of these latter have grown successfully on a southern slope at Gladwyne, near Philadelphia, Pa. One is now a sturdy shrub about 8 feet high and nearly 6 feet broad; the other is shorter but much broader. Both flower yearly, providing a brilliant splash of color in midsummer, from about July 12 to August 22. On a second visit to this spot, some very large plants of this species were found. The tallest specimen was 16 feet high, but the largest was 11 feet 8 inches tall and 15 feet 3 inches broad (*Henry 1888*, PH).

A second midsummer-flowering species is *Rhododendron serrulatum* (Small) Millais, a white-flowered plant which often occurs in wet hammocks or along the edges of streams and woods on the coastal Plain from Florida to Louisiana, according to Rehder,³ and as far north as southeastern Virginia.⁴ In 1930 I had brought a young plant of this strong-growing species from Okaloosa County, in western Florida, (*Henry 1344*, PH)⁵ to Gladwyne where it has grown well, flowering simultaneously with *R. prunifolium*. The flowers of this plant are rather inconspicuous owing to their small corolla lobes and the fact that usually only a few flowers are open at the same time. It has little to recommend it from a horticultural standpoint, except its late-flowering habit.

These two species of *Rhododendron* have flowered year after year at Gladwyne without ever setting a seed capsule. However, it occurred to me in 1944 that a cross between the two might produce a plant horticulturally valuable in that it perhaps would combine the midsummer flowering habit with pink flowers which would be more appealing in late July than vivid red ones.

Accordingly both *Rhododendron prunifolium* × *R. serrulatum* and the reciprocal cross were tried. The anthers were removed from unexpanded buds and after pollination all other blooms were removed from the twigs. The pollinated flowers were bagged with very fine nylon netting which was carefully fastened

² Lanjouw, J. & F. A. Stafleu, *Index Herbariorum*, Pt. 1. The Herbaria of the World. *Regnum Vegetabile*, Vol. 2. 1952.

³ Rehder, A. *Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs*, ed. 2, p. 722. 1940.

⁴ Fernald, M. L., *Gray's Manual of Botany*, ed. 8, p. 1120. 1950.

⁵ This documenting specimen came from the same colony as the 1930 plant but was not made until a subsequent visit in 1938.

with tightly twisted plastic-covered copper wire. Plump seed capsules resulted on both shrubs, but the seed did not ripen until after frost in October.⁶ The seeds were planted January 22, 1945, and germinated in 3 weeks. It was soon apparent that the seedlings were intermediate between the parents in leaf and stem characteristics. After a winter in the cold frame and three seasons in a protected trial garden they were planted out. The first hybrid bloomed July 4, 1948; the flowers were a beautiful pink.

About 18 of the hybrids have flowered thus far. In 1952, the first year that they were thoroughly established in the open, there was bloom from July 14 to August 20. There is some variation in the size of the flowers and also in the color and characteristics of the young twigs. One plant bears white flowers (without the slightest spotting or shading of any color) while those of another plant are a warm, light carmine of great brilliance. The intermediate size of the corolla and various vegetative characteristics, particularly those of the young twigs, indicate the hybrid nature of these two plants, however. The remaining hybrid plants are pink-flowered, combining the characteristics of the two parent species. As among almost all seedlings, some flowers are of finer form than others. The largest and finest flowered plants are being used as parents for a second hybrid generation.

There are few important midsummer flowering shrubs for the mid-Atlantic section of the country and I have never seen any of greater beauty or of more exquisite coloring than these vigorous, free-flowering new hybrid azaleas. They appear, moreover, to be quite hardy, for many of them growing on an exposed, windy hillside, without even a mulch of leaves over the bare ground, have been subjected to below-zero temperature without any injury whatsoever. The new hybrid seems to me to be of great horticultural interest and worthy, therefore, of designation other than by hybrid formula. Because it originated at Gladwyne, I propose to call this new azalea *Rhododendron* × *gladwynense*.

⁶ It may be of interest to note in this connection that mature seed of *Rhododendron prunifolium* were collected by T. G. Harbison for the Arnold Arboretum in Randolph County, Georgia, in November of 1917, when the leaves were still on the shrubs. Wilson E. H., and A. Rehder, A Monograph of the Azaleas, *Rhododendron* subgenus *Anthodendron*. Publ. Arnold Arb. no. 9. p. 170, 1921.

Rhododendron × **gladwynense**, hybr. nov. (Hybrida inter *R. prunifolium* (Small) Millais et *R. serrulatum* (Small) Millais). Ramuli juniores pubescentes; gemmae florales perulis flavido-brunneis margine brunneis albo-ciliolatis apice mucronatis. Folia obovata vel oblanceolata acuta, 2.5–11 cm. longa et 1–3.6 cm. lata, glabra, costa media supra pubescens subtus sparse strigosa, margine ciliolata. Flores mense Julio et Augusto, plerumque 4–7 subumbellati; pedicelli 8–13 mm. longi pubescentes et villosuli pilis glanduliferis. Sepala oblonga, 1–2 mm. longa, margine pilis longis setosis eglandulosis instructa. Corolla infundibuliformis rosea; corollae tubus 2.5–3 mm. longus, extus sparse villosulus pilis glanduliferis, intus pubescens. Stamina filamentis roseis, 5.5–6.5 cm. longis, infra medium pubescentibus. Stylus plerumque quam filamenta ca. 1 cm. longior, 6–7.5 cm. longus, basim versus pubescens; stigma viride. Ovarium dense setoso-strigosum setis eglandulosis.

Young branchlets brown, both minutely pubescent and with scattered longer hairs; floral winter-bud scales glabrous, mucronate or mucronate-aristate, pale yellowish-brown with a dark brown band along the white-ciliolate margin, the mucro often nearly black. Leaves obovate to narrowly obovate or oblanceolate, 2.5–11 cm. long, 1–3.6 cm. wide, puberulous on the midrib above, slightly strigose on the midrib beneath, otherwise glabrous, the margins ciliolate with upwardly adpressed hairs. Flowers appearing after the leaves, July to late August, in 4–7-flowered umbel-like clusters; pedicels 8–13 mm. long, both minutely pubescent and villous with glandular hairs, the distal portion shaded with carmine. Calyx lobes oblong, 1–2 mm. long, ciliate with long, eglandular hairs. Corolla funnelform, moderately glandular-villous without, the lobes grenadine pink (Ridgway) (rarely white or carmine), with or without a barely perceptible salmon-orange blotch within, the tube 2.5–3 cm. long, Rose Doré (Ridgway) (rarely white or carmine), pubescent within. Stamens with filaments 5.5–6.5 cm. long, geranium pink, the lower half pubescent; pollen ample. Style 6–7.5 cm. long, usually exceeding the stamens by about 1 cm., pubescent near the base; stigma green. Ovary densely covered with pale eglandular setae.

TYPE in Herb. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila.: *Mary G. Henry 6124*, July 22, 1951; also *5982*, July 31, 1950, and *6166*, February 11, 1953; all from the same plant in cultivation at Gladwyne, Pennsylvania.